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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM URGES CALM, CAUTION AMONG KOSOVAR
LEADERS AMONG RUMORS OF DELAY IN STATUS PROCESS

Classified By: COM Tina S. Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) With rumors swirling of a delay in the status process and statements by EU High Representative Solana and UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari appearing to confirm these speculations, COM counseled calm among Kosovar Albanian leaders the week of October 2. Meeting with the Prime Minister, the parliament Speaker, the President, and opposition leader Thaci, all members of the negotiating team, COM noted there was no delay formally agreed, but cautioned against "year-end ultimata" to the international community that would box Albanian leaders into a corner and undermine their own aspirations. With Thaci, she underscored that any move to abandon the Unity Team at this critical juncture in hopes of bringing down the Kosovar government would confirm the skepticism of those in the international community who doubted the political maturity of the Kosovar Albanians, and could bring the whole status process to a halt. Thaci agreed to stay within the Team, a promise he made good on the weekend of October 7, when he convinced his party presidency to vote overwhelmingly in favor of the negotiations. Still, anxiety is in the air among all Kosovo's leaders with regard to the status timeline; their concerns have been assuaged for the moment but they will need clear indications of where the process is going in order to maintain an air of confidence for their party memberships and their people over the next few months. End Summary.

COM to Prime Minister, President, Parliament Speaker: Be Calm, Avoid Ultimata

12. (C) In separate meetings throughout the week of October 2, COM met with key Kosovar leaders to counter the confusion and anxiety surrounding press assertions that the status process could be delayed by weeks or months as a consequence of the Serbian election calendar. With the possibility that any of the leaders might choose to make public comments counter-productive to the status process, and with reports that opposition leader Thaci was already threatening to walk out of the Unity Team and bring down the government as a result of the delay rumors, COM underscored to all that calm and caution should be their watchwords. She stressed that there was no formal decision on delay, but that, given the

uncertainties involved, it made no sense to issue ultimata to the international community on a year end resolution to status. By talking about the possible negative consequences of delay in Kosovo and particularly by doing so in a provocative way, COM pointed out, Kosovar leaders would confirm the worst fears of those in the international community who doubted their ability to maintain stability and demonstrate leadership even under difficult circumstances. They would also make it far more difficult for themselves in explaining any delay, should it occur, to their people.

13. (C) Prime Minister Ceku, Speaker Berisha and President Sejdiu all concurred, agreeing to express their hope for a year-end resolution in a measured way publicly. Convening a meeting with international liaison representatives on October 5 (reported septel), Prime Minister Ceku made it clear he would prefer no delay, but underscored the flexibility of the Unity Team, urging only that if there must be a delay, the international community consider pushing off implementation of the settlement rather than the status announcement itself.

All three Kosovar leaders, however, as well as opposition party head Thaci (and Unity Team coordinator Blerim Shala), implored the Contact Group and particularly the U.S. government not to leave them hanging at year's end and to help soften the blow for their constituencies if a delay became inevitable.

COM to Thaci: Stay in the Game, Don't Provoke Instability

14. (C) COM had a lengthy conversation with PDK president Hashim Thaci on October 5, after reports surfaced that he had openly threatened to walk out of the Unity Team and intensify attacks on the Kosovar government in an effort to unseat the Prime Minister and install himself in the job. COM made the

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same points on the avoidance of provocative actions to Thaci as she had to the other leaders, but emphasized even more strongly the importance of unity among the Team and the extreme negative consequences for status if the negotiating group fell apart. She made it plain to Thaci that while the U.S. could not support an upheaval in the government at this critical juncture (a point that a ranking French diplomat had made earlier in the week to Thaci, as well), there would be plenty of time for the PDK to make its case to the Kosovar electorate in the coming months, and bringing down the status process would not earn Thaci any credit with the international community or his potential Kosovo supporters. Thaci, though unrepentant in his desire to get himself into office as soon as possible, conceded that this was not the time to walk away from the Unity Team and promised COM he would recommit himself to the process. (Thaci made good on his word two days later, when after a seven-hour meeting with his party presidency, he emerged with an overwhelming vote in favor of continuing the negotiations.) He also promised to appear jointly with President Sejdiu and the Unity Team on television and in sensitive municipalities in order to sell the decentralization concept -- again fulfilling his word by meeting October 6 with Sejdiu and offering his cooperation in person.

Comment

15. (C) By week's end, a measure of calm had been restored among Kosovo's leaders, and the Unity Team remained pasted together if only by a mixture of tough messages and cajoling from COM. The Kosovars are reluctantly coming to accept that there may have to be a delay of some length in the status determination, but they are deeply afraid of bringing that news to their people and they will look for any cover available to make the delay palatable. With an effective hiatus in the negotiation process (at least insofar as active negotiating sessions on decentralization and community rights are concerned), there is also more time for mischief among the Unity Team's members and far greater temptation for Thaci to jump ship and blame the government for the delay. We will

bring all our leverage to bear in avoiding this outcome, but will need Washington's help in crafting meaningful reassurances, preferably delivered by high-level visitors in the weeks preceding the end of the year. End Comment.

16. (U) U.S. Office Pristina does not/not clear this cable for release to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari. K Aidanow